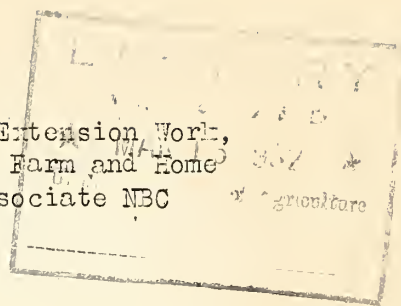


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THE COUNTY AGENT AT WORK



A radio talk by H. W. Hockbaum, Office of Cooperative Extension Work, broadcast in the Land Grant College Program of the National Farm and Home Hour on Wednesday, February 17, 1932, by a network of 56 associate NBC stations.

Friends of the Farm and Home Hour:

Do you know that 2,400 counties now employ county agricultural agents? This is 85 per cent of the farming counties of the Nation. There are 6,000,000 farms, so we have one county agent for every 2,500 farms.

Who employs these agents? What manner of men are they? What do they do?

The county agent is a local representative of the nation-wide system of cooperative extension work. This system brings to the man on the farm, the woman in the rural home, and the youngsters as well, the vast educational resources of the State colleges of agriculture, the experiment stations, and the United States Department of Agriculture. The system is tried and true. Some counties have employed county agents for 20 years or more.

Local support and cooperation are the first requirements in extension work. No county agent is placed in a county unless the farmers want him. They must agree to cooperate with him and the extension system. Moreover, the farmers must want a county agent so much that local funds are obtained to help pay the cost. The county governing bodies now subscribe 46 per cent of that cost. Fifteen per cent comes from State funds. Local extension associations of farmers and in some counties business men's associations give 8 per cent. The balance -- 31 per cent -- is from Federal funds. This arrangement makes the cost small for any one county.

What manner of men are the county agents? Well, they come in all sizes and shapes. The average county agent is about 30 years old. Ruddy complexion and clear eyes mark him as an outdoor man. He radiates health, vitality, enthusiasm, energy. He likes folks and mixes with all. He is enthusiastic about the farming and the farmers of his county. He knows farming because he is farm-reared. He is trained in scientific agriculture of course. He begets confidence. The farmers trust him, know that their problems have his first interest. He likes his job and is always on the job.

What does the county agent do? He brings to the farmer the best and latest information from the State college of agriculture and the Federal Agricultural Department. He shows farmers how to apply such information to their individual needs. He interests farmers in growing more profitable crops or livestock or in more profitable methods of production. He informs the agricultural institutions of local farm problems which may need attention. He visits farm after farm. His office is a Mecca for hundreds of farmers who come for information, suggestions, help. Of course he does not always know, but he does get what information is available from the college, Department, or from farmers in the county who have met the particular problem. All this is free to everyone.

Many of you have seen the county agent at work when emergencies arise.
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Come storm, flood, hail, drought, plagues of disease, or insect and animal pests, and he hustles to find relief. During the big drought of 1930 the county extension agents and relief agencies dispensed food and supplies to the needy. They helped farmers find feed for their stock. Requests for reduced freight rates on stock, feed, and seed passed through the agents' hands. They helped administer feed and seed loans. They prompted farmers to grow emergency feed and food crops. Thousands of farmers in some Southern States now grow vegetables, produce milk, butter, eggs, meat for their tables and grow their own feed crops. They have learned to live at home.

But the agent's main responsibility is even bigger. The way to larger farm incomes is barred by doors which cannot be opened by trying only efficient and safe production as a key. These doors, like a safe, are locked by a combination. Efficient production is part of that combination to be sure. Now the farmer's problem is to learn the whole combination. It is not easy. You know how great the problem is of meeting costs of production. Farming is affected by terrific shifts and changes, by tremendously vital problems in marketing, transportation, costs of production, prices. These problems tax to the utmost the ingenuity and resources of the farmer and all who have the welfare of the country at heart. Present issues are not the only ones involved. Business and economic conditions have been changing for years. The social order has changed. We are an industrial nation. Agriculture is not dominant. The old day of the self-sufficing farm as an independent unit has passed. Farming is a business, not a mode of life. The new age calls for new methods, new codes of business and social ethics. The word "cooperation" may be a stale term to you. Call it by any name you wish. The fact remains that the farmer of to-day, trying to meet to-day's situations, joins with his neighbor and his neighbors' neighbors. They work with the extension system and other State and Federal agencies to find out what readjustments will put them in a better position.

Where does the county agent come in? He is bringing the farm leaders together, to recognize and face the issues, study them, understand the changes and the causes. Together they work with the extension system, farmers' organizations, State and Federal agencies. They are isolating some of the problems. They are finding solutions which they may recommend safely to the farmers of a county. They work out a program of readjustments. They are learning the combination that opens the doors to a more profitable, satisfactory country life.

This then is the first job of the county agent and the extension system. He finds the leaders, brings them together, helps them function. He and the leaders make the program of readjustments with the help of the extension system. They make plans for carrying out that program. They stimulate others to adopt the recommended readjustments. The county agent makes local surveys, gets data from the farmers themselves. He obtains farm-management, outlook, marketing and other economic facts from college and Department. He brings the best counsel to work on the local problems. He studies and plans. He encourages the leaders, develops cooperation, gets the program built.